

Dean's Vienna dares to step outside the waltz

By **ROBIN USHER**

COMPOSER and musician Brett Dean is excited and cautious. He has prepared the four concerts making up the contemporary Metropolis series for the Melbourne Symphony featuring work from Vienna "none of us has heard live before".

He says the program is based on the early 20th-century composer Anton Webern and is dedicated to the "spirit of the new" in Viennese culture. It features four of his works, two of which have not been heard in Melbourne, and four other works by contemporary composers having their Australian premiere.

But Dean is wary of contemporary music being isolated from the standard repertoire of classical music. "This unified program is like a mini-festival but it can't end here," he says. "It's too easy to say that completes our responsibility to new music."

He says it is important to encourage audiences to become curious about all sorts of music.

"One of the hardest things is to find balance in any programming. My own music sits better in a program of more traditional repertoire, because that is where I come from. New music cannot be left on its own in a ghetto."

Not that there is any danger of that with Metropolis. It is the only contemporary series organised by a state orchestra in Australia and is held every autumn in the Malthouse Theatre over 10 days.

Dean says two of the concerts will be broadcast live, while the others will be recorded and go to air later on ABC Classic FM.

His aim is to extend Vienna's image beyond Strauss waltzes. "I have chosen to present a view of Vienna that paints a fuller picture of human creativity and diversity than the touristy clichés of a town in three-quarter time."

He will introduce each concert from the podium before taking on the role of conductor. He will also play the solo part in his own viola concerto on May 4, conducted by Fabian Russell.

Dean achieved international prominence in 2008 when he was awarded the \$200,000 Grawemeyer prize in the US for his composition *The Lost Art of Letter Writing*.

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BRETT DEAN, composer

Metropolis soloists will include soprano Merlyn Quaife, pianist Michael Kieran Harvey and trombonist Brett Kelly, while members of the Australian National Academy of Music will take part in the first concert tonight.

"It is a joy to be working in a combined sense with the two Melbourne music institutions most dear to my heart and with whom I've had the longest and most intense involvement," Dean says.

ANAM graduate Stefanie Farrands, who is now studying in Berlin, will play the solo in a viola concerto by Olga Neuwirth that only premiered two years ago. "This will be her first chance to shine," Dean says.

Two winning works from the MSO's recent Cybec Australian composers program will have

their world premieres at the festival: Joseph Twist's *I Dance Myself to Sleep* and Luke Paulding's *the air a bright shatter of wings*.

The MSO's managing director, Matthew VanBesien, says the Vienna theme also celebrates the forthcoming Winter Masterpieces exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, *Vienna: Art & Design*, which concentrates on the works of Gustav Klimt and Egon Schiele.

Dean says the artists and composers were part of the explosion of creativity in Vienna in the early 20th century, but while the painters are internationally renowned the musicians are not.

Webern's *Four Songs*, which were composed during World War I, are receiving their Australian premiere on April 30 and the series includes a major work from every phase of Webern's creative life.

"Webern liked to play with tradition and his *Symphony* is loaded with irony — it is only nine minutes long," Dean says. "It is the absolute opposite of the big Viennese symphonic tradition associated with Mahler."

He says the Viennese built on the work of Webern and others so that work by today's composers such as Staud and Furrer are well known in Europe, if unheard of here.

Following the final two performances on May 4 and 7, the Malthouse will showcase the work of DJs, electronic musicians and video artists from Vienna's SoundFrame Festival, including audio live act Cid Rim, DJ Anna Leiser and video by super e:v/a.

Metropolis is at the Malthouse Theatre tonight, April 30, May 4 and 7.

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